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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESSES AL-HAKIM ON DEBAATHIFICATION

REFORM

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: In a March 6 meeting with SCIRI leader Abdulaziz al-Hakim, the Ambassador and General Petraeus urged al-Hakim to make rapid progress on deBaathification reform. Specifically, the Ambassador asked for al-Hakim's assistance in ensuring Shi'a coalition support for a draft law to be submitted by the Presidency Council and for a moratorium on new deBaathification orders until reform legislation is passed. Al-Hakim said that he did not see any problem with moving quickly on deBaathification reform. Al-Hakim raised fears from the Shi'a community that the U.S. was turning against them and that Sunni Arab leaders were seeking to impose a solution on Iraq. In a private session, he also expressed deep concern over the detention of his son Ammar and said that Iranian leaders had denied any involvement in facilitating anti-coalition networks in Iraq. End summary.

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The Need for Rapid Progress on DeBaathification Reform  
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¶2. (S) The Ambassador told al-Hakim that rapid progress on deBaathification reform was critical to both Iraq and the U.S. The Ambassador reminded al-Hakim of his statement that Iraq had turned a new page with Saddam's execution and suggested that genuine deBaathification reform would be an important manifestation of this progress. Speed was very important from the U.S. perspective, the Ambassador continued, because Congress was soon going to consider President Bush's funding request for Iraq. Results on deBaathification reform would help correct the impression that Iraq's leaders were not ready to take the necessary steps toward reconciliation. General Petraeus noted that there was a great deal of frustration and impatience in Washington. To assure strong U.S. support, he explained, Americans would need to see an improvement in the security situation and clear, sustained progress by Iraqi leaders on difficult political issues. The CG explained that the coalition in conjunction with Iraqi security forces can improve the security situation, but that only the Iraqi leaders can bring about the needed political changes. The CG stated that Sunni Arabs need to see the GOI reaching out to them and Iraqi leaders should recognize the strategic importance of this moment.

¶3. (S) Turning to specifics, the Ambassador laid out two steps to al-Hakim. First, he referred to his work with the Presidency Council on a draft deBaathification reform law that it could present to the Council of Representatives (CoR), a "unifying effort toward reconciliation and accountability." President Jalal Talabani and Vice President Tarik al-Hashemi, he said, were supportive of the proposed legislation. Vice President Abdel Mehdi, the Ambassador continued, was personally supportive as well but felt like he needed clearer backing from the Shi'a coalition to move forward. The Ambassador asked al-Hakim to give Abdel Mehdi

his full support to move forward in the next several days. The Ambassador also asked al-Hakim to support a moratorium on new deBaathification orders from the Higher National DeBaathification Commission (HNDBC) until new legislation was passed. He closed by reiterating the significance President Bush and the U.S. government placed on rapid progress on deBaathification reform and how important al-Hakim's support would be.

14. (S) Al-Hakim said that he did not see any problem with moving quickly on deBaathification reform and said he would ask Abdel Mehdi to do so on behalf of the Shi'a coalition.

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Shi'a Fear Abandonment by U.S. and International Community  
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15. (S) Al-Hakim then raised several issues of concern to the Shi'a community. The Shi'a feared, he said, that the U.S. had changed its position on Iraq and would side with Sunnis. After watching "dedicated, committed Iraqi security forces leaders" being detained by the coalition only to see "massacres" ensue, as al-Hakim claimed happened in Diyala, the Shi'a had begun to question coalition intentions. "The Shi'a are wondering if the coalition is influenced by Baathist information. Even I have no answers to some questions." The CG reiterated to al-Hakim that the vast majority of coalition targets are Sunni extremists and that the fear that the coalition had turned against the Shi'a was unfounded.

16. (S) On the issue of security, al-Hakim said that Shi'a leaders had been pressuring Shi'a groups that were inciting sectarian violence to stop. These efforts were helping, he continued, but there was no comparable reduction in car

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bombings and other attacks by Sunni extremists. "If these attacks continue for another two or four months, Shi'a will ask what they are supposed to do." Finally, al-Hakim claimed that the Shi'a are being pressured by Sunni Arab leaders to undo key principles of the constitution. He called Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa's recent statements on Iraq "dangerous" and described the Arab League as "opposed to federalism." The Ambassador assured al-Hakim that the U.S. strongly supported democracy in Iraq, noting that democracy served the interests of the Shi'a as the majority but included protection of the rights of minority communities.

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Ammar's Detention and Quds Force Networks  
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17. (S) In a smaller meeting, al-Hakim expressed his deep concern with the detention of Ammar al-Hakim, asking whether it was meant as a message to undermine SCIRI-U.S. relations. General Petraeus explained the circumstances, assuring al-Hakim that the detention was not the result of targeting of Ammar and did not signal any change in the relationship with SCIRI. He offered his apology for any possible sense of mistreatment Ammar might have felt and pledged to look into it further. In turn, General Petraeus asked that al-Hakim to ensure that Iranian leaders realize how unhelpful lethal activities are in Iraq. Al-Hakim said he had raised the issue with Iranian leaders, impressing on them that the coalition was present at Iraq's invitation and that it was morally wrong to target its soldiers. According to al-Hakim, his Iranian interlocutors denied any involvement in networks targeting coalition forces. Al-Hakim expressed his willingness to raise the issue again but said he would need specific evidence given the Iranians' denial.

KHALILZAD